

NORTH FORK OF THE BUFFALO RIVER

Boundary Description

North Fork of the Buffalo River in Amherst County from its confluence with Rocky Branch upstream to its headwaters for a total distance of approximately 2.6 miles.

Observations

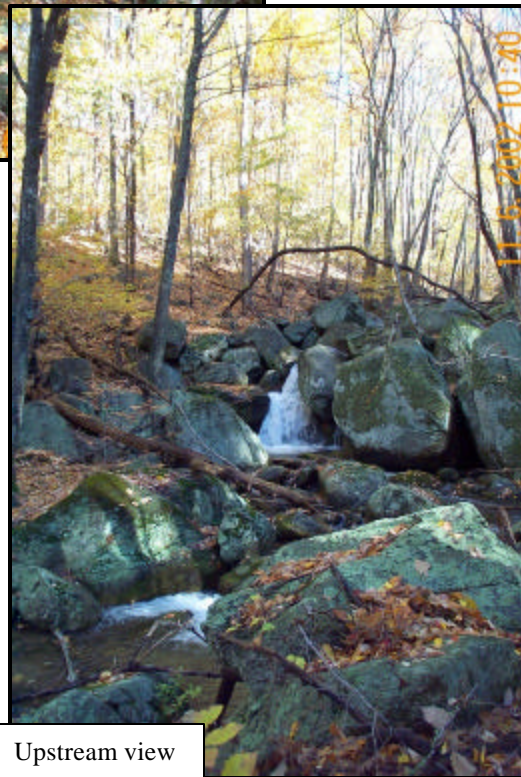
On November 6, 2002, David C. Whitehurst as required by DEQ Exceptional Waters guidance conducted a site visit to the nominated segment of North Fork Buffalo River in Amherst County. The nominated portion is entirely contained within the George Washington National Forest and a well-defined trail loosely parallels the length of the nominated segment from the national forest boundary to the headwaters. The trail that follows the stream provides for a vigorous yet not overly strenuous hike in a relatively remote area with numerous sites suitable for primitive camping.



Looking down from the trail

The nominated segment of the North Fork Buffalo River is a high gradient, plunge pool type stream whose substrate is dominated by boulders. Some of the boulders are immense and the gradient steep enough that in some sections one can be standing next to a plunge pool and the immediate upstream pool is almost at eye level. The large rocks dominate to the point that they define the character of the stream.

Native brook trout were observed in a number of pools and a cursory benthic survey was done at several points and numerous individuals of the families ephemeroptera (mayflies), plecoptera (stoneflies), and trichoptera (caddisflies) were seen, as were crayfish. The



Upstream view

Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) designate the North Fork Buffalo River as Class ii wild natural trout waters and is not stocked by DGIF but instead relies upon a self-sustaining population of native brook trout. A self-sustaining population of native trout is considered indicative of nearly pristine conditions. A number of fish of the cyprinid family were observed also, as were two species of salamander. Wildlife observed included deer, belted kingfisher, red tail hawk, Cooper's hawk (tentative identification), tufted titmouse, and numerous other species of birds.



North Fork Buffalo River provides excellent opportunities for day hikes, overnight backpacking, small stream native trout fishing, photography, and bird- and wildlife watching.

Conclusions

After considering observations made during a visit to the site, staff has concluded that North Fork Buffalo River satisfies all three of the eligibility criteria to be considered for designation as Exceptional Waters. The environmental setting, recreational opportunities, and aquatic communities in the nominated segment of North Fork Buffalo River appear to be of exceptional quality.

